DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 457 CS 002 820

AUTHOR Poesic, Carla
TITLE Current Trends in Italian Literary Production for Children and Young People.
INSTITUTION Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Tehran (Iran).; Iranian Commission for UNESCO, Tehran.; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Paris (France).
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Children's Literature in the Service of International Understanding and Peaceful Co-operation (Tehran, May 15-21, 1975); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Books; *Childrens Literature; Conference Reports; Cultural Exchange; Cultural Interrelationships; *Global Approach; *Italian Literature

ABSTRACT

This report, given at a special meeting held in Tehran, discusses various kinds of children's books in Italy, focusing on fairy tales and legends, modern fiction with surrealistic perspectives, adventure novels, and nonfiction, as well as the illustration of children's literature. An appendix lists some Italian authors, their works, and publishers. (JM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE SERVICE OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND PEACEFUL CO-OPERATION

ORGANIZED BY THE
INSTITUTE FOR THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS
IN COOPERATION WITH UNESCO AND THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO IN IRAN

15-21 MAY 1975 , TEHRAN

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Children's Literature in the Service of

International Understanding and Peaceful CO-operation

Tehran, 15-21 May 1975

Current trends in Italian literary production for children and young people

Carla Poesio

Italy

In reviewing the current trends of Italian literary production for young people I looked for a common basis which could also constitute an element of discussion in the recapitulation of the findings of our workshop. I am of the opinion that such a basis can be found in the underlying differences, antinomies, conflicts (most of which almost impossible to overcome) typical of mankind, often stressed in our books for young people. Such stressing may appear quite contrary to the idea of international and even of national understanding, but actually the sincere and honest aknowledgement of differences is the only way of building up a a dialogue, a possibility of communication. An evaluation of conflicts and differences existing among individuals or among social and ethnical groups, can be made NOT in view of discrimination, but aiming at a deep acquirement of data, which will permit to define the terms of the different problems, and to meditate upon them, according to personal initiative. The problem is how to evaluate the instruments (that is the narrative language) suitable to let young people realize these difference, NOT in a traumatic way, or, still less, in an affected one, but in a dynamic, constructive way.

From the fairy tale field we can draw an example of the way in which evaluation of difference can lead to mutual understanding. When we

offer young people myths, sagas, legends or fairy tales of one country's lore, we allow them to seize the distinctive marks of its people, its most genuine features. In the past such inheritance was transmitted verbally until some learned men, some scientists, collected them from the voices of the story tellers (on the example of Grimm Brothers) and gave to the narrative a literary form.

In Italy Italo Calvino is the best re-writer of fairy tales which he has taken from many 19th century collections and has translated from dialects to Italian, making them understandable to children and to adults, and giving them also a personal style (as it is common with every storyteller). In reading these Italian fairy tales or folk tales, and comparing them with the ones belonging to other countries (which are extensively edited in Italy) children and young people have the opportunity of discovering many elements in common among them. Nothing has greater effectiveness for the young reader than discovering that the same them, for instance, the obstinate research of the beloved lover on the part of the heroine of a tale, let us say, by Afanasiev, can be found, only a little disguised, in The Arabian Nights, or in an Italian folk tale. It is the discovery of the common matrixes of the history of men, the discovery of the deep common roots belonging to an epoch when mankind was not yet divided.

"Uniqueness" and "communality" thus alternate and every one can get the importance of such a phenomenon.

I must add that today there is a remarkable interest in collections of fairy tales or legends belonging to ethnical minorities. In Italy, for instance Gipsy Tales and American Indian Tales were a great

success. The reason of such interest has to be found in the desire of revaluating some cultural inheritances which in the course of history have been too often neglected or even cancelled.

Modern tales in fanciful, or better, in surrealistic perspective, are typical of our production for young people after the second world war. In so far as fantasy is concerned, I must underline that in Italy we have not such ethereal creations as the ones by the English writers Lewis or Tokien. Italian writers show in their books a very tight bound with reality, and a continuous engagement not to forget it. Sometimes we can say that in their books the fantastic situation is nothing but a clear projection of reality. The writer starts from a situation which is typical of everyday reality; than we find a sudden prance, an unexpected twist and the hero or the heroes of the plot are transferred in a surreal world and live there surrealistic events. It is, in a certain way, the proceeding employed by Carroll in Alice in Wonderland, more than a century ago, but with different consequences. Gianni Rodari, for instance, one of our best contemporary writers, in his book Gip nel televisore, makes his hero, Gip, enter all of a sudden in a television set and lived there a new abnormal life. Another of his heroes, Marco, in the book Il pianeta degli alberi di Natale, is kidnapped and transferred in a planet where one can always find a Christmas atmosphere and a sense of peace which men have not reached on Earth. What happens to Gip and Marco far from Earth has an important effect on their everyday life when they come back to it.

The situations - where reality is generally upside down - at the core of the novels and tales we are speaking of, have the same values

they had for Jonathan Swift when he created the glamorous contrast between large and small for his hero Gulliver (something very far from Edward Lear's nonsense rhymes). Such deliberate absurdity means, in fact, a criticism of the wrong sides of our world and of our society. Such is in fact the task of humour, a dynamic and constructive force, which drives people to reconsider the universe around them, controlling and judging its deformities, its dogmatism, its conventionalism and outwards conformity, which are among the most dangerous causes of intolerance and misunderstanding. Let us take another example:Le die ci citta (Ten towns) by Marcello Argilli. Each town represents the exasperation of a deformity of our society. "successopolis", for instance is the town where the only goal which people aim at is success. The star of the cinema, the fashionable painter, the football champion, the heroes of illustrated magazines, are the idolatrated gods of a new Olympus, and everyone tries blindly and fractically to imitate them. The hero of the tale is a common man who decides to react. Every year in this town, three great competitions take place: one for the best picture, the second for the best film, the third for the best book. He decides to take part in them. He sends to the first jury a white canvas, to the second a blank film, to the third a book with empty pages. It is his way of mocking both the juries and the organizers of the competitions. But the first jury proclaims him the winner because his white canvas i they say- is so full of suggestions and implied meanings; the second announces that the best film is the one with non-shot sequences (so revolutionary and original!); the third jury declares unanimously that the best book is the one with non-written pages (a true innovation and a quite significant

one!). Our hero becomes famous against his will and has to undergo the persecutions of his admirers and the unpleasant consequence of success. At a certain moment he makes up his mind to retire in hermitage, far from such a crazy world and he settles on the top of a mountain. But, after a short period of silence and peace, one day he becomes aware that a big crowd is clibing the mountain to reach him: he has set the " fashion of hermitage" and everyone wants to imitate the successful man; everyone wants to become a hermit. Our hero is doomed to bear the weight of sucess for ever.

In an other tale, Questurinia (Policemen's Town), the town is charaterized by the continuous intrusion of the police in the citizen's life. A policeman has idealised his task to such a point that he begins to suspect of himself (without any reason at all!) and he shadows himself day by day until he send himself to prison.

Like Marcello Argilli, Giovanni Arpino, Italo Calvino, Ermanno Libenzi point out the alteration of human life owed to consumism, to the invasion of concrete buildings, to the pollution of nature, to the sense of violence. From their books, though humour and fancy are their main features, we find that imagination is not an escape or a flight from reality, but a constructive force which help to see the "other side" of things, the dark or cheerful side of the medal, and also to see that happiness and goodness are possible even if not realized in our world. This flexibility of the reader, his capacity of crating links, comparisons and references is also stimulated by historical novels which can be considered the most important variant of adventure novels. They follows presently in Italy two trends:

a) either they introduce historical recent milieu and events, a subject not deeply treated by text books, but about which reader often hears people discussing (for instance: the birth of fascism, how it could assert its authority and last 20 years in Italy; or the political situation of Italy during the second world war);

b) or a novel introducing past history, even of remote ages. The reader has here the occasion of comparing past and present, of discovering how many points they have in common, taking however into consideration the fact that man is not always the same in the course of time. To compare, to build links be tween ourselves and the others, betweeen present and past, means, I believe, to find out our own essence and the essence of our time. One of the best examples is a book by Giuliana Boldrini: Caccia alle streghe (Witch hunt), the story of a 16th century trial of a so-called witch, ending with the sentence of the victim to the stake. In this book the writer implies that men have often condemmned as evil and diabolical what they cannot understand or they do not want to understand in others. She suggest also that men will not change until they will be afraid of science, of truth, of freedom and will try to suffocate them by violence and torture.

One more example on this line: Ankur il Sumero by Domenico Volpi. In this book the hero, Ankur, a simple man living in 3000 years B.C. between Tigris and Eufrates, invents the wheel. In short his invention becomes the centre of avidity and covetoushess. The king of the country wants to get it to become as powerful as possible; soldiers want it to increase their strenght; merchants to increase their earnings; priests make of the wheel the symbol of a new religion. The inventor, frightened

and exaspereated, chooses exile in a far country, among simple shepherds where he will build some little chariots as toys for children around him. We can find many ways of interpreting the significance of this book: one of them might be the instrumentation of science, but many other do exist in relation to contemporary problems.

It appears from the requests of readers and from the acceptance of modern novels proposed to them, that a true "hunger" of actuality does exist nowadays. Readers like identification with characters involved in problematic situations typical of our time.

Among such situations we find for instance:

The consequence of internal emigration (frmm the south of Italy, an economically underdeveloped part of our country, compared with the North which has had a strong industrial development). Immigrants find it difficult to be included in the new milieu and often find themselves misunderstood or relegated to "ghettoes". One can easily understand what dramatic impact this situation has very often on children and young adults, and which frictions it gives rise to. The best writer in this field is Renee Reggiani, the first one who introduced the problem of the South in our literature for young people.

Another important theme is the one of the mafia: a criminal organisation assuming different aspects throughout the course of history, and always trying to substitute itself to legal authority with fictious laws of so called honour. On the theme of mafia Giuseppe Bufalari, one of our best writers, has created a new formula of book for young people: the insertion of some narrative "intermezzos" in a context of informative flashes of news.

There is also the theme of the conflict often existing between parents and children, young people and adults. Marcello Argilli, with Ciao Andrea, has dealt with it, pointing out the new role of both generations, in the light of new engagements which each one has towards the society to which he belongs.

A very important social theme is the exploitation of the work of children and young people troughout the course of time. Giuliana Boldrini deals with this theme in a series of tales from the construction of Pyramids to the factories of to-day. The chronological progression of these tales puts the problem of the continuity of the injuries brought upon the mental and phisical integrity of children and the means of defence against these exploitations still continuing in our time in almost all countries (according to recent inquiries of Unesco).

Many of these topics were taboo in the literature for young people of the past, when writers implied an assent of the reader to some patterns of behaviour. Thus the reader was excluded from a personal discovery of values or of meanings in his own reading. To day the concept of education is quite far from any dogmatic and constrictive line. Thus the writer must offer not one, but many alternatives, many possible interpretations and expect from his reader a personal, authonomous choice.

Such orientation can be found also in non fictional books, the sort of books which readers look the most for, which has reached in Italy a rather high level.

The documentation which such books offer is also stimulating towards other types of research and opens the way to the deepening of many subjects, also outside the one which is at the core of the book

itself.

The technique of presentation is fictional without being fiction; it keeps the flavour of adventure, the emotion of suspense, it supports the identification of the reader with the central hero or his participation in sharing problems of other people; it meets the modern aim of young people for some forms of spiritualism against consumism, mass society.

A remarkable feature we must take into consideration is this: such non fictional books, be the histories of techniques, or biographies, or the approach of young people to masterpieces of painting, or the presentation of historical and scientific problems, have not only the aim of offering a series of notions, but of accusetoming the reader To STATE A PROBLEM, to draw a sketch plan of the research he intends to develop. This sketch plan can be filled afterwards by different data, but the most important moment is the first one. To find data, in fact, will be easier and easier by the increasing progress of various means of communication. What is and shall remain important is the way to put together, to organise personally all the information one has got through different media and this can be taught by good non fictional books.

Culture is and will be to morrow a creative operation.

This is the trend also in the best Italian illustrators for young people. Even if the largest part of our production is often limited to a mere decorative role or is submitted to the convention that illustration is just a copy of reality, we must underline a tendency aiming at the stirring of a reaction of consertment or dissent in the observer.

Sometimes the aim is to stimulate the observer to take part in the

operation of the illustrator, that is to put into the illustration (by his imagination) something of his own, making its borders larger, and its content richer.

This happens also at the level of a very young readers, with picture books as those by Jela Mari. They are illustrations concerning natural phenomena (the birth, development and death of animals or vegetals, for instance) in a cyclical sequence, which is clear also from the fact that the picture book has not a beginning and an end, but presents a circular and continuous course.

Elsewhere the illustrations stimulate intervention or personal interpretation as in Munari's Nella nebbia di Milano (In the fog of Milan). A combination of transparent pages gives the idea of Milan in the fog: the more the reader turns the pages the more an object reveals itself. Sometime it is a concrete object (a car, a street lamp), sometimes it is something indefinite (the evocation of a circus, a ball game, or some element which are transferred from the fog to the dream).

Emanuele Luzzati stirs children's imagination with scenographies full of things which are not visible but on the verge of visibility. Consent or dissent can be provocated by the dramatic interpretation of reality by Alberto Longoni.

The problems for writers as well as for illustrators, is to induce the reader to meditation, and, afterwards, to participation, engagement, disponibility.

The provocative self expression of the writer or of the illustrator shall be an invitation to creativity of young readers, the only ones who can change-more than adults actually do-the world, on his way to dishumanization.

APPENDIX

CALVINO, Italo	Fiabe italiane, Einaudi
" " "	Il principe Granchio, Einaudi
" " "	L'augellin Belverde, Einaudi
SOLINAS DONGHI,	Beatrice Fiabe incatenate, Rizzoli
" " "	La gran fiaba intrecciata, Rizzoli
BALDINI, ANTONIO	La strada delle meraviglie, Einaudi
LA CAPRIA, RAFFAELE	Colapesce, Mondadori
DRAGHI CAPORAI	Racconti dell'Europa magica, GIUNTI/Bemporad-Marzocco
VORISKOVA-CAPORALI TOSCANO	Racconti tzigani, GIUNTI/Bemporad Marzocco Marzocco
RODARI, GIANNI	Cipollino, Editori Riuniti
" " "	Gelsomino nel paese dei bugiardi, Editori Riuniti
" " "	Il pianeta degli alberi di Natale, Einaudi
" " "	La torta in cielo, Einaudi
" " "	Il palazzo di gelato, Einaudi
" " "	Gli affari del signor Gatto, Einaudi
" " "	Filastrocche in cielo e in terra, Einaudi
" " "	Favole al telefono, Einaudi
" " "	Novelle fatte a macchina Einaudi
" " "	I viaggi di Giovannino Perdigiorno, Einaudi
" " "	Gip nel televisore, Mursia.
MARIANELLI, Sauro	Damiano dal viaggio strano, paravia
" " "	Fuga nel quadro, Einaud
PAETI, Antonio	I viaggi di Taddeo, Einaudi.
BOSSI, Floriana	Il re del disordine, Einaudi
ARGILLI, Marcello	Le 10 citta, Bompiani

ARPINO, Giovanni	Rafe e Micropiede, Einaudi
" " "	Assalto al treno, Einaudi
CALVINO, Italo	Marcovaldo, Einaudi
LIBENZI, Ermanno	Il Pianeta dei matti, Garzaniti.
GUARNIERI, Rossana	Non puo accadere a noi, Muzsia
SABBIETI, Mario	Una stagione per crescere, Fabbri
SOLDAN, Luciano	E questa giovenule Monnia
ISAIA, Nino	La galiota, le Monnier
BOLDRINI, Giuliana	Il segreto etrusco, Vallecchi
" " "	Il leone di Micene, Vallecchi
" " "	Verso le Idi di Marzo, Mondadori
VOLPI, Domenico	Ankur il Sumero, La Scuola.
BOLDRINI, Giuliana	Maja della streghe, Le Monnier.
REGGIANI, Renee	Quando i sogni non hanno soldi, Fabbri
" " "	Il treno del sole, Garzanti
" " "	Domani dopodomani, Vallecchi
" " "	Carla degli scavi, Garzanti
MARTINI, Luciana	Marco in Sicilia, Vallecchi
Bufalari, Giuseppe	Pezzo da novanta, Le Monnier
Russo, Antonio	Il deserto sulla collina, Massimo
ARGILLI, Marcello	Ciao Andrea!Fabbri
TUMIATI, Lucia	Caro maestro capellone, Mondadori
BOLDRINI, Giuliana	Ragazzi in vendita, Mondadori
DE MATTE Enzo	Il regno sul fiume, Mursia
PACINI	S.O.S. per il pianeta Terra, Giunti/Nardini
ARDIZZONE-ROCCODE LEON	Europa:un'idea,La Scuola

ARDIZZONE-ROCCO DE LEON Israele: lo stato problema, La scuola

CARGNONI, Giacinto America latina: umanita allaaprova, La scuola

MAZZOLENI,Filiberto Arrivano gli Indiani,La scuola

ZAVATTI.Silvio L'esplorazione dell'Antartide, Mursia

COLOMBI-RANIERI La grande avventura dei l'uomo, AM.Z.

AA.VV. Ecco il mondo A.M.Z.

SCHIAVOCAMPO-La BELLA Io e il mondo, Mursia

GRANDE ATLANTE DELLE FONTI ENERGETICHE

DELLA NATURA Capitol

NARDINI,Bruno Vi a di L nardo, GIUNTI/C.I.L.

NARDINI,Bruno Incontro con Michelangiolo, GIUNTI/C.I.L.

CONTI,Laura Il dominio sulla materia, Monadori

REPOSSI,Giordano Il sogno della maccnine storia illustrata della storia illustrata dela cibernetica, GIUNTI-Nardini Editore

MASINI,Giancarlo Sulla giostra delle stelle storia illustrata dell' astronomia GIUNTI-Nardini Editore

MASINI,Giancarlo La rivincita di Icaro storia illustrata dell'astronautica, GIUNTI NARDINI EDITORE

CARPI,Pini La notte stellata van Gogh, vallardi

CARPI, Pini L'isola dei quadrati magici Paul Klee, Vallardi

CARPI,Pinin La zingara della giungla Rousseau, Vallardi

ORI Il diario del sole rosso Joan Miro, Valardi

GANDINI,Giovanni La minestra di polenta Brugel, Valaddi

MARI,Jela Il palloncino rosso EMME ED.

MARI,Jela La mela e la farfalla " " "

MARI,Jela	L'uovo e la gelline EMME ED.
MUNARI,Bruno	Nella nebbia di Milano, EMME ED.
MUNARI,Bruno	Da lontano era un'isola, EMME ED.
LUZZATI,Emanuele	I paladini di Francia Mursia
" " "	La gazza ladra, Mursi
" " "	La tarantella di Pulcinella, EMME ED.
LONGONI,Alberto	Il reame pietrificato, EMME ED.
LONGONI,Alberto	Il polipo e i pirati, EMME ED.